

THE FIRST MASONIC FUNERAL IN SAN FRANCISCO.

San Francisco, Cal. Sept. 30, 1863.

BRO. CHAS. W. MOORE—

Dear Sir— Herewith I send you an account of the first Masonic Funeral in California. I also send you some items that are not contained in the paper sent. Mr. McCondray gave a musket box to make the coffin ; and they say it made a very nice one. A Bro. Mason from the State of Maine, by the name of Robertson, whittled out the gavel for the Master. The Bro. who acted as Master at that funeral is the present Tyler, and Past Master of Occidental Lodge, No. 22, Joel Noah. A Br. Mason from Scotland, by the name of McDonald, made the four rods for the Deacons and Stewards, out of a piece of joist, given by a lumber dealer by the name of Smyley—lumber was dear in those days. A Br. Mason from England, by the name of Worthington, made the compass and square out of a tin can. The aprons used on the occasion were made by tearing the back out of white shirts of each Brother, for most every one had white shirts, but did not wear them. The strings of the aprons were made by tearing strips from the shirts. The funeral marched through the principal tented streets, and the body was buried close to where the corner of Howard and First streets now cross each other.

The body when first discovered was taken to the black liquor storage tent, of Griss. It has since been ascertained that the Bro. was from Nottinghamshire, England, where he had a sister.

By publishing the first Masonic Funeral in your Masonic Magazine, you will oblige a

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In the contemplative hour of retirement how many thrilling reminiscences of the past crowd upon the memory? Some of them are of a pleasing and others of a peculiarly painful character. The year 1849 will ever be a memorable epoch in the history of California. The commercial and gold seeking adventurers “met on a level” in those days. There were no granite buildings to trade in, nor were there splendid palaces to live in, such as now adorn the surrounding hills of San Francisco. Thousands of people who had been long accustomed to all the refinements and luxuries of Eastern life, had to doff their fine linen and put on the red shirt of the hardy miner. Pride was unknown for a time. Gentlemen had to stoop from their dignity and awkwardly wash their own clothes. They had to kindle their own fire and do the menial work of a *cuisinier*. Some reposed at night in a canvas tent, while others closed their eyes in sleep among the sand hills, with no other covering but the canopy of Heaven—

“ Bespangled with those isles of light,
So widely, spiritually bright.”

Exposure and disease rapidly peopled the kingdom of death. The *Ayuniamiento* had not yet set apart any ground for burial purposes. The consequence was that many were rudely buried in the suburbs, and were afterwards removed to Yerba Buena Cemetery, where the remains of eight hundred lie huddled together in one immense dismal grave. There is not even a common board to mark out the remarkable pit in which sleep so many unfortunate pioneers of Upper California. In those eventful times men were found dead and no one could tell from whence they came. They passed away to their graves unhonored and unknown. Distant friends and relations were never informed of their fate. Anxious parents in foreign climes still cherish the hope that their sons are yet in the land of the living, and may return to the

domestic roof. Vain hope! Their eyes are sealed in death, and the grave has closed over them forever.

The Fraternity “of the mystic tie” had not yet organized. There was not a Lodge in the State. They only knew each other by the *legal information* which craftsmen only know and properly understand. A wonderful instance of Masonic identity occurred in the month of August, 1849. A much respected citizen and Mason, who is still living, was quietly wending his way up Happy Valley, very early in the morning, when he beheld the corpse of a man stretched upon the pebbly beach. All was soft and still. The strangely mingled population of the tented city was wrapped in deep repose. The mists still lingered on the suburban hills, and the morning star shone clearly in the sky. The waters of the Bay were smooth and calm, and gently laved the feet of the stranger who “slept the sleep that knows no waking.” The great Dispenser of human events, in his inscrutable providence, seemingly had determined that the tide should bear his lifeless body to the shore, where, discovered by a passing Brother, it would assuredly be carried to the grave in becoming solemnity, and deposited therein with all the honors and ceremonial rites of the ancient Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons.

“ There’s a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them as we may.”

Some of the inmates of the neighboring tents were roused from their slumbers and speedily repaired to the spot. The Alcade was immediately sent for. He promptly attended and acted coroner. The body was removed to a tent, where it was carefully scrutinized. No indications of violence were visible. The man had evidently been drowned. His face was manly and intellectual. His hair was long and curly and of a dark auburn hue. He was neatly dressed and had a superior air of respectability. The jacket and pants on his person were blue pilot cloth, and a black silk handkerchief was tied in a sailor’s knot round his neck. There was nothing found in his pockets that could possibly lead to his identity. However, in removing the flannel from his bosom, a silver mark of a Mark Master was discovered, upon which were engraved the initials of his name. A little further investigation revealed to the beholders the most *outré* exhibition of Masonic emblems that were ever drawn by the ingenuity of man on human skin. There is nothing in the history or traditions of Freemasonry equal to it. Beautifully dotted on his left arm, in red or blue ink, which time could not efface, appeared all the emblems of the Entered Apprentice. There were the Holy Bible, the Square and Compass, the twenty-four inch Gauge, and the common Gavel. There were also the Mosaic pavement representing the ground floor of King Solomon’s Temple, the indented Tessel which surrounds it and the Blazing Star in the centre. On his right arm, and artistically executed in the same indellible liquids, were the emblems appertaining to the Fellow Craft degree, viz the Plumb, the Square and the Level. There were also five columns, representing the five Orders of Architecture—the Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite.

In removing the garments from his body, the Trowel presented itself, with all the other working tools of operative Masonry, besides all the emblems peculiar to the degree of Master Mason. Conspicuously on his breast were the three Great Lights of Masonry. Over his heart was the Pot of Incense. On other parts of his person were the Bee Hive, the Book of Constitutions, guarded by the Tyler’s Sword ; the Sword pointing to a naked Heart, the All Seeing Eye ; the Anchor and Ark, the Hour Glass, the Scythe, the forty-seventh problem of Euclid; the Sun, Moon, Stars and a Comet; the Three Steps, emblematical of Youth, Manhood and Age. Admirably executed was the weeping Virgin, reclining on a broken column, upon

which lay the book of Constitutions. In her left hand she held the pot of Incense, the Masonic emblem of a pure heart, and in her uplifted right had a spring of acacia, the beautiful emblem of immortality of the soul. Immediately beneath her stood winged Time with his scythe by his side, "which cuts the brittle thread of life," and the Hour Glass at his feet, which is ever reminding us that, our lives are drawing to a close. The withered and attenuated fingers of the Destroyer were delicately placed amid the long and gracefully flowing ringlets of the disconsolate mourner. Thus were the striking emblems of mortality and immortality beautifully blended in one pictorial representation. It was a spectacle such as Masons never saw before, and in all probability, such as the fraternity may never witness again.

In the meantime the sun was rising in the East. The smoke of a thousand tents was now ascending from the surrounding hills and valleys, which plainly told that the hardy pioneers were busy preparing their morning repast. The flags of different nations were waving from the masts of the emigrant ships that were anchored in the Bay, the sounds of sweet music in the distance fell faintly on the ear. There was a solemnity all around peculiarly befitting the occasion. The news soon spread from tent to tent, and crowds hurried to the spot where the body was exposed. No one, however, could identify, him. A perfect mystery hung over the stranger, and still hangs over his memory. His history may never be known. It mattered very little to the Masons who were present from what country or clime he came, or in what language he spoke while living. It was enough for them to know that he was a man and a Mason, to secure him decent interment. The body was laid in a wide but substantial coffin, and borne in silence to the brow of a neighboring hill, where it was buried with becoming honors. The mourners stood around his grave, each one wearing a white apron, which from time immemorial has been "the emblem of innocence and the badge of a Mason." There were eyes bedewed with tears that were unused to weep. The occasion was as solemn as it was extraordinary. In the entire absence of all empty pomp and ostentation, there were the manly and undisguised feelings of Masons moved to a touching extent over the humble grave of an unfortunate Brother. The funeral service was impressively read by Lieut. Col. J. Noah. The Brethren severally dropped a spring of evergreen upon the coffin, and after an appropriate prayer, the dust of Happy Valley forever covered the mortal remains of the mysterious stranger whose body was so beautifully embellished with Masonic emblems. Peace to his ashes.

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